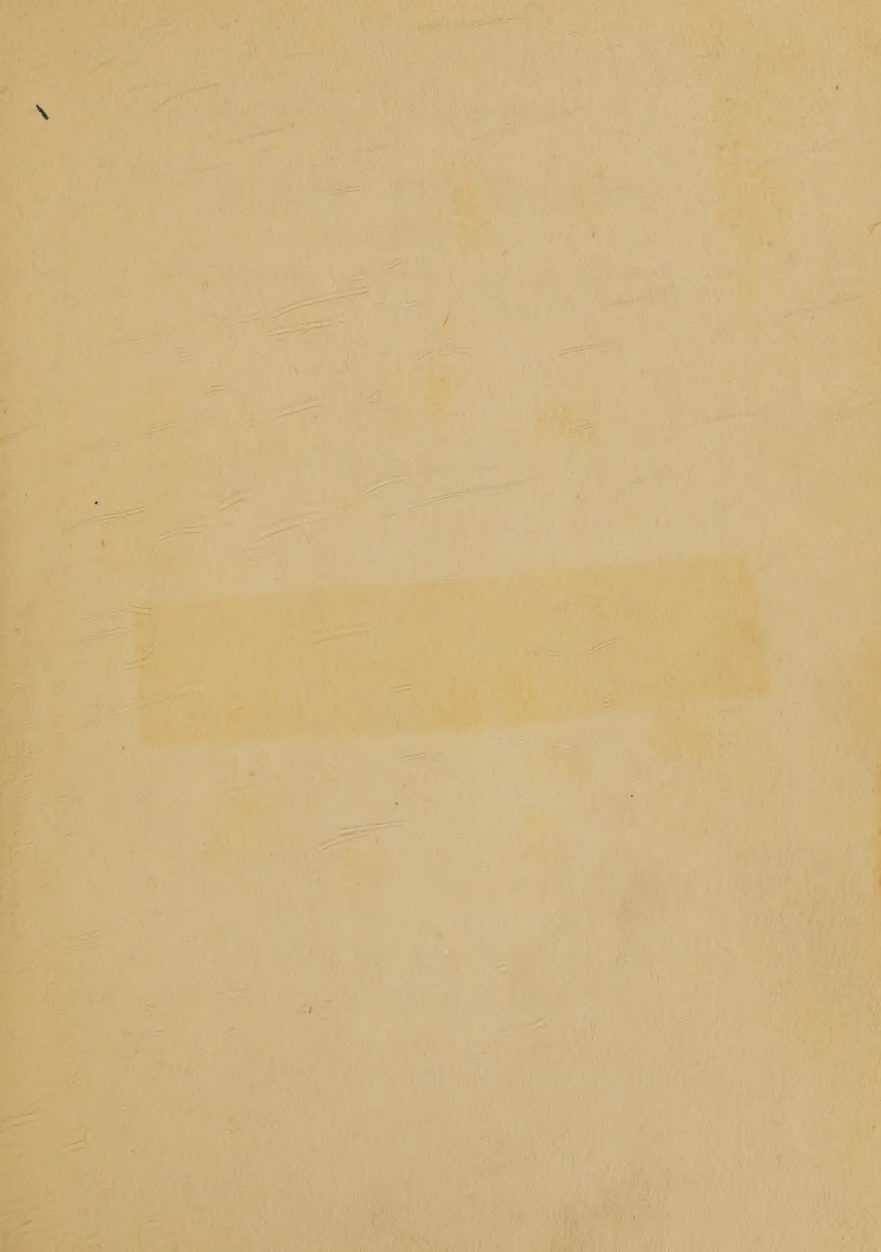


NED DAWSON
IN
WILFUL LAND
JAMES LEE ORR



Jean Morehead

"65"



NED DAWSON

IN

WILFUL LAND

By
JAMES LEE ORR
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ILLUSTRATED
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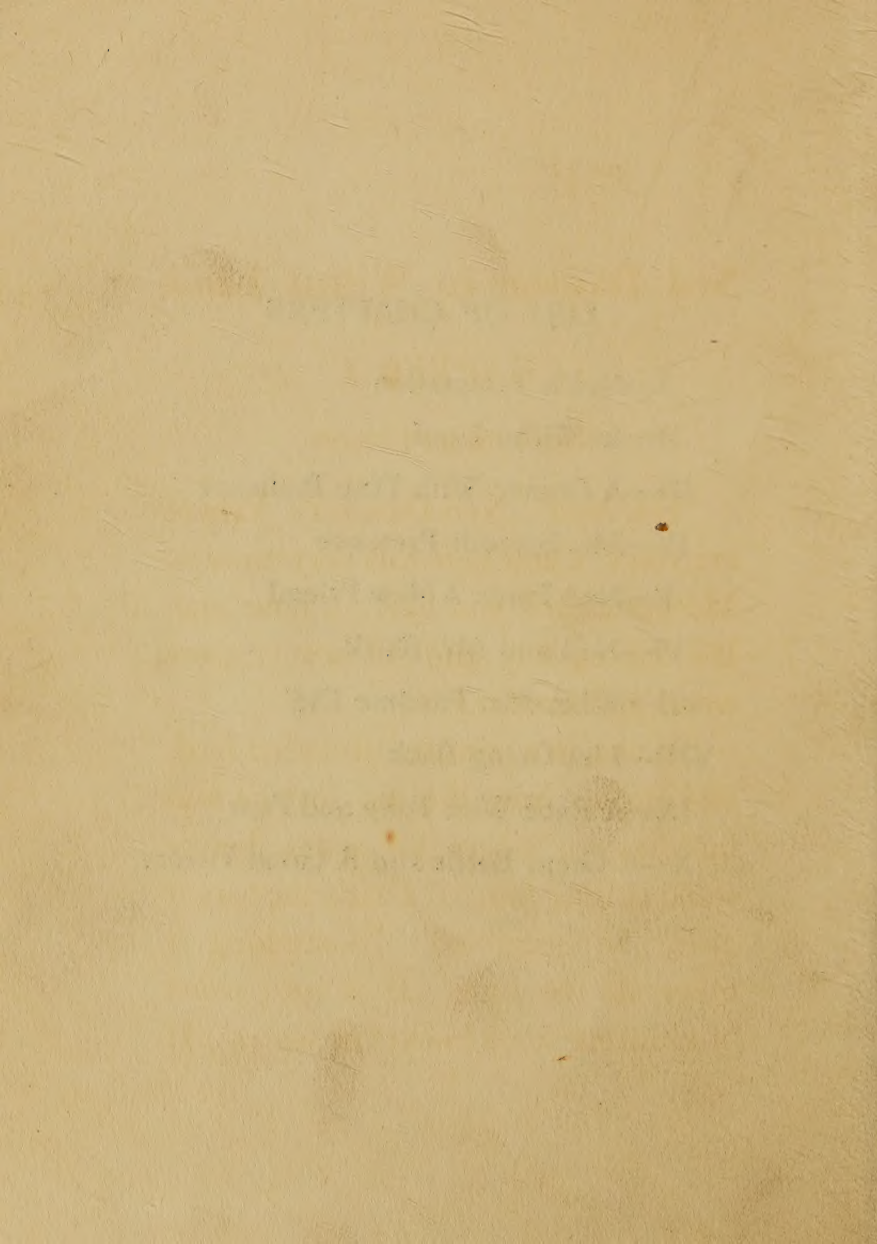
JAMES LEE ORR

To the boys of energy and activity—boys in whom the fullness of life expresses itself in a ceaseless struggle to overleap the barrier of self-control, by which the great things of life can best be accomplished—this little volume is respectfully dedicated.

May it teach them that effort, to be successful, must be wisely directed, and that "He that ruleth his own spirit is better than him that taketh a city."

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Ned Dawson in Wilful Land

CHAPTER I

NED'S TEMPTATION

"Ho, Ned! Ned Dawson! Where are you? Come here this very minute. Mother called you half an hour ago. It's baking day and she wants some wood and kindling."

"Ya-as, in a minute," drawled Ned, looking up from the sod fort he was building to where his sister Jennie stood calling him. "That's the way it goes," he grumbled. "Something 'r other all the time. If it isn't wood 'n kindling it's a bucket of water. If

it isn't a bucket of water it's take out the ashes. A fellow doesn't get time to do anything around here. Wish I could go away somewhere and never come back any more," he continued, as he added another sod and a stone or two to his fort.

"Hurry up, Ned! Don't be so slow! Mother's waiting," called Jennie impatiently.

"Ya-as, I'm coming. Can't you wait a minute?" said Ned more crossly than before.

Grumbling and scolding he went toward the shed where the kindling was kept and gathering up an armful he carried it into the kitchen.

"Thank you, my boy," said his mother cheerily. "I need a panful of

apples, too, from the tree in the garden. Will you get them for me, Ned?" Then, as she noticed the frown on his face, she said, "Come, Ned, be good and help mother and she'll bake you an apple turnover. I know you will like that."

Ned brought the apples but the sullen look did not leave his face as he went back to play.

"It's the same old thing," said he. "It's always 'be good, be good.' A fellow can't get anything without bein' good. Apple turnover is all right, but why does a fellow have to 'be good' to get it? Why can't he get something for bein' bad, too—I mean something he wants," he added as he remembered things he had got at

different times when he had not been very good. "Wish there was a place where a fellow could get things for bein' bad as well as good. Bet I'd go there. An' I'd stay there, too. Nobody wants to be good all the time."

He was still muttering and talking to himself when he became aware of a little man standing on the wall of his sod fort and watching him cunningly as he worked.

"Did you want something?" asked Ned.

"Not as badly as you do," said the little man with a polite bow.

"What do you mean?" asked Ned.
"What do you think I want?"

"A trip to Wilful Land," said the little man winking his eye knowingly.

"Wilful Land?" echoed Ned.

"Where is that? Who are you?"

"I am Mr. Genius—Mr. Evil Genius, if you please. I serve the King of Wilful Land. It is not very far away. Every one can do just as he pleases there and nobody has to 'be good.' Would you like to go? If you would, we can start at any time. I'll be glad to show you the way. Will you come?"

"I don't know," said Ned. "I'd like well enough to go, but I've heard about you. Sometimes you get people into trouble, don't you, Mr. Evil Genius?"

"A scandalous story told only by people who are jealous of me," said Mr. Evil Genius. "Do I look dan-

gerous or troublesome?" Besides, how could I get you into trouble in Wilful Land, where everybody does just as he pleases? You do not have to obey me there."

"And can I come back if I don't like it?" asked Ned.

"Certainly," said Evil Genius. "But it is not so easy coming back, because the way is all up hill."

"I guess I wouldn't mind that," said Ned. "Maybe I wouldn't want to come back anyhow. I'm tired chasing around after kindling and carrying wood and water and being always told to 'be good.' "

"Nobody tells anybody to be good in Wilful Land," said Evil Genius. "And nobody would do it if he did.

Even King Obstinacy himself can't make people obey there."

"Then I guess I'll go," said Ned. "I'd like to live where I could do just as I pleased. Maybe Mother and Jennie would come, too, after they found how nice it is."

"Perhaps they would," said Evil Genius. "But if people don't start when they are young, they are not likely to come after they get older."

"Then there must be lots of boys and girls there to play with," said Ned.

"Plenty of them," said Evil Genius. "I, myself, have taken a great many there and more are coming all the time. There's Will Fullness, who is a stirring fellow. Then

there is Ima Sloth and Petu Lance, both fine little girls, and there are the Lence boys, Indo Lence and Inso Lence. They are said to be twins, and where you find one you are very likely to meet the other. Oh, there are plenty of boys and girls in Wilful Land."

"Where would I live in Wilful Land, Mr. Genius?" asked Ned.

"I know a man there who wants all the boys and girls he can get," said Mr. Evil Genius. "He is a friend of mine. His name is Bedience—Mr. Diso Bedience. He lives on Fret Street. He would be glad to have you, I am sure."

"What does he want with so many boys and girls?" asked Ned.

"He lets them work for him," said Evil Genius. "He has a large vineyard and raises all kinds of forbidden fruits."

"Do they have to work all the time?" asked Ned.

"Oh, no," said Evil Genius. "You see, forbidden fruits are all natural fruits and grow with very little attention. In fact, the less attention the better they seem to grow. The boys that work for Diso Bedience are idle most of the time."

"I'd like that," said Ned. "I'm tired waiting on people and having to do things when I want to play."

"Just so," said Evil Genius. "Then you are the kind of boy that my friend

Mr. Diso Bedience wants. Will you go?"

"Yes, I will," replied Ned. "Which way do we go, Mr. Evil Genius?"

"Straight down the hill," said Evil Genius. "Turn to the left at every corner. Be careful to never turn to the right or try to turn back. Keep right on going down. It's down hill all the way. That's what makes it so easy."

So saying he took poor Ned by the hand and the downward journey began.

CHAPTER II

IN WILFUL LAND

Ned and Mr. Evil Genius journeyed on together for a long time, making many turns to the left till they had gone far down the hill into Wilful Land. Mr. Evil Genius proved himself a very interesting traveler and told Ned all about the people and places they saw as they went along. After awhile Ned noticed that it had suddenly grown quite dark. As the way was rather rough and steep at that particular place, they found it hard to keep from falling.

"Are the days in Wilful Land shorter than ours, Mr. Evil Genius?" asked he.

"Oh, no," replied Evil Genius. "It is not night yet. The sun sprites have just quit working and we shall have no light till they are ready to go to work again."

"What are sun sprites, Mr. Evil Genius?" asked Ned.

"They are the little workers that tend the sun's lamps and keep them in order so the light will continue to shine for us," said Evil Genius. "But, as everybody does just as he pleases here, they sometimes quit work and let the lamps go nearly out."

"Can't the King keep them at work

as long as people need the light?" asked Ned.

"No," said Evil Genius. "King Obstinacy is sometimes very cross and not always reasonable. He often insists on having things done that other people do not like and his subjects do not obey him as loyally as they would if he treated them more kindly. Many of his people are glad to see the sun sprites disobey him even if it does leave the whole realm in darkness for a while. It is easier to get good service by love and kindness than by being harsh and cruel. If the sun sprites are not willing to give us light we shall have to go in the dark."

"That seems funny," said Ned.

"Suppose they should refuse to work for a week or more at a time?"

"Then we should have no light," said Evil Genius.

"But, when would people sleep?" asked Ned.

"Whenever they pleased," said Evil Genius. "People don't sleep much here anyhow. At any rate everybody does just as he pleases. Would you like to sleep?"

"No," said Ned. "But I wouldn't mind having something good to eat. Does anybody here ever bake apple turnovers?"

"Not that I know of," replied Evil Genius. "But if you are hungry we'll ask Mr. Diso Bedience to give you

something as soon as we arrive. We are not far from there now."

In a little while they came to the home of Mr. Diso Bedience. His place is the first in Wilful Land at which visitors usually stop. It did not look very attractive to Ned at first. The house was a large, ramshackle building that seemed to have been built, one section at a time, by many different builders and looked like patch work of no very pleasing pattern. The lawn was overgrown with thistles and briars that stung and scratched whenever one touched them, and there were broken places in the walks in which one was apt to trip and fall. Just in front of the entrance was a great heap of broken

furniture and unused goods of every description that gave the place more the appearance of a junk-shop than of a home.

"It doesn't look like a very nice place," said Ned.

"Not at first sight," said Evil Genius. "But you'll get used to it after awhile, and then you won't mind it."

"I wonder why all that rubbish is left there?" said Ned.

"That?" replied Evil Genius. "Oh, that is merely a lot of useless rules and broken promises that people who come here have found it necessary to get rid of from time to time. It really ought to be taken away and disposed of, but Mr. Diso Bedience is so busy

taking care of his forbidden fruits that he has no time to attend to it."

"I wonder if he'll want me to clear it away?" said Ned.

"No fear of that," said Evil Genius. "You'll find enough to do helping with the fruits."

"What kind of fruit does he grow most?" asked Ned.

"Oh, sour grapes, choke cherries, thorn apples, bitter regrets and many others," replied Evil Genius.

"I don't believe I'll like any of them," said Ned.

"Perhaps not, at first," said Evil Genius. "But you'll soon get used to them. I wouldn't tell Mr. Diso Beldience that I didn't like them if I were you. Tell him they are all

sweet and good, if he asks you about it."

"But, that would not be telling the truth," said Ned.

Mr. Evil Genius threw back his head and laughed loud and long. "Ha, ha, ha, ha! Just hear him talk!" said he. "He is going to live in Wilful Land and always tell the truth. Ho, ho, ho, ho! Could anything really be funnier than that? Get over it, Ned, get over it. It's too much trouble to always tell the truth here. Besides, nobody else ever does it."

"Then I think I'd better go back," said Ned.

"You'd find it harder than you think to get back up that long steep

hill," said Evil Genius. "Come, Ned, don't be a coward and a baby. Go ahead like a man. We'll find Mr. Diso Bedience and have him give you something to eat. After that you'll feel better. I'm sure he'll have plenty of work for you."

"But, you said Mr. Diso Bedience wanted boys who liked play better than work," said Ned.

"Did I?" asked Evil Genius. "I must have been thinking of something else. Of course, Mr. Diso Bedience wants everybody to work. How else could all the forbidden fruit be taken care of? But the work is no harder than play. Besides, if he makes you work too hard you can run away again. I know a Mr. Smooth Pre-

tence who will be glad to have you. But, here comes Mr. Diso Bedience, himself. Now we will see what he can give us for dinner."

CHAPTER III

A DINNER WITH DISO BEDIENCE

While Ned and Evil Genius talked the sun sprites had gone to work again and now they could see Mr. Diso Bedience very plainly as he came toward them. Ned was not very favorably impressed with his looks. He was a cross and sullen looking man with weak and shifty eyes that never looked anyone straight in the face. One could see that he had had lots of trouble and that it had completely spoiled his temper. As he caught sight of Ned and Evil Genius the crafty look on his face deepened till it was almost a sneer.

"Well," he said. "You here again? Who have you got this time? What do you want, anyhow?"

"This is my new friend, Ned Dawson, Mr. Diso Bedience," said Evil Genius. "He wants to work for you. But he is very hungry and must have some dinner first. Can you give him something to eat?"

"Not till I know what he's here for and what he's going to do," said Diso Bedience. "I'm tired feeding tramps. If people want me to feed them they must do my work."

"Oh, Ned's willing to work. Aren't you Ned?" said Evil Genius, winking to Ned to be careful what he said.

"Yes," said Ned. "I'll work some,

but I want a little time to play, too. And I'm not a tramp, either."

"There you go," said Diso Bedience with a sneer. "Just like all the rest of 'em. I've never had a good boy come here yet. They all want to play more than work. And if they can't have their own way they get saucy and impudent. Well, he can't stay here unless he'll work."

"What kind of work would you want me to do, Mr. Diso Bedience?" asked Ned.

"Do whatever I tell you to," said Diso Bedience. "What difference does it make what you do so long as you are clothed and fed? Do you expect to do just as you please when you work for me?"

"No, not all the time," said Ned. "But I'd like to do as I please sometimes. Mr. Evil Genius said everybody could do just as he pleased here."

"He did, eh?" said Diso Bedience. "Well, they can't do it in my house. Nobody gets anything from me without earning it. If you work for me I'll feed you. If you don't you go hungry, and that's all there is to it. I do as *I* please here, and you do what I tell you."

"I'm very hungry now, Mr. Diso Bedience," said Ned. "I'll be glad to work for you if you'll give me an apple turnover."

"Apple fiddlesticks," said Diso Bedience. "Why don't you ask for hum-

mingbird pie? You'd be just as likely to get it. There'll be no apple turnovers here. You'll eat what you get as other people do. And you'll earn what you eat or you won't eat at all. No idlers in my house if I know it, and no dainties either."

Poor Ned. He was so hungry and so discouraged that he almost cried. Mr. Diso Bedience told them they could wait for dinner if they wanted to and then he went away and left them together.

"So, this is the good time you promised me in Wilful Land, is it?" asked Ned. "Well, Mr. Evil Genius, it will be a long, long time before I listen to you again."

"Oh, fuddle," said Evil Genius.

“What’s the use of getting fussy? Diso Bedience isn’t half as bad as he pretends to be. He’s just a little out of sorts today. Tomorrow he’ll be all right again. Wait till you’ve had your dinner and get started to work. You’ll feel better then.”

“But, that was all a story about everybody doing as he pleased here,” said Ned. “Why did you tell me that?”

“To get you started,” said Evil Genius. “You would never have come without it.”

“If it’s to be like this I’ll soon wish I hadn’t come,” replied Ned.

Before they could say anything further dinner was announced. At the table Ned found himself seated

with several other boys of his own age all apparently as hungry as himself. None of them seemed cheerful and contented. They all looked sullen and acted as if they were half starved, and their faces were bruised and scratched as if they had been fighting. As soon as they sat down they began to clamor and quarrel and snatch each other's food so that the larger and stronger ones got most of what there was on the table. Poor Ned got very little and what he did get was poorly cooked and almost unfit to eat. Mr. Diso Bedience stormed and scolded all the time but he showed very little control over the boys and seemed to be worried more by the cost of the food than by the bad manners of his

family. Of course he managed to get the largest and best portion of the dinner on his own plate but while he was scolding and berating the boys for eating so much, Mr. Evil Genius, who sat next to him, managed to steal it nearly all away from him and slip it into his pocket. When Diso Bedience discovered the loss of his dinner he accused the boy next to him of taking it and cuffed him most brutally, at which Evil Genius only laughed. But Ned knew who had stolen the dinner.

“Well,” said Ned to himself. “I can’t stay here, that’s certain. I’d starve to death in a week. I’d rather run errands forever than live in such a place as this. Evil Genius has de-

ceived me. I wonder if I could find my way back home without him."

As soon as they had finished eating, Mr. Diso Bedience began to storm and scold at the boys again and drove them back to work in his vineyard.

"Get along there, Ned," said he crossly. "You go with the others and see that you do enough work to pay for the good dinner you've had. No idlers around here, remember. It's either work or starve. You come with me, Evil Genius," he continued. "I'll not trust you with the boys. You're all right to bring them here, but I'll not have you meddling with them after I get them."

So saying he and Evil Genius went away and left the boys to their work.

Ned did not know at first just what he was to do but he watched the other boys and soon found out that most of their time was spent in quarreling and fighting among themselves. If one of them did undertake to up-root and destroy any of the briars and thistles that grew everywhere another was sure to slip up behind and trip him or push him into the bushes so that he got dreadfully scratched by the thorns. Then they would quarrel and fight about it instead of trying to destroy the weeds. Ned was still very hungry and tasted some of the forbidden fruits, but they were all fearfully bitter and he could not eat them. At last he determined to run away and taking advantage of a moment when

the sun sprites had quit working and it was quite dark he slipped out of the vineyard and started down the rough, steep road that Evil Genius had told him led to Mr. Smooth Pretence's home.

Poor Ned! If he had only started up the hill instead of down how much better it would have been.

CHAPTER IV

MR. SMOOTH PRETENCE

Ned hurried along as fast as he could, going farther and farther down hill all the time. Once or twice he was tempted to turn to the right, but he remembered what Evil Genius had told him about the turns and, acting under that wicked influence more from habit than otherwise, he turned to the left instead. The further he went the steeper and rougher the path grew and, although the sun sprites had gone to work again and the light shone as brightly as ever, he got several hard falls that hurt

and bruised him dreadfully, and he felt weaker after every fall. When he had walked on for a long time and was less afraid of Evil Genius and Diso Bedience, he came to a pretty little house set in the midst of flowers and shrubbery. It looked so quiet and peaceful that he knocked at the door to find out who lived there. A pleasant looking little man answered his knock and when he saw how tired and worn Ned was asked him to come in and rest.

“Thank you,” said Ned. “I shall be glad to if you will let me. I don’t want Evil Genius or Mr. Diso Bedience to get me again.”

“Ah,” said the little man, with a knowing look. “So you have been

with Diso Bedience, have you? Well, I am not surprised that you want to rest, if what I hear is true. They say he is very cross and cruel to his boys. But, how did you come to go there?"

"Mr. Evil Genius took me there to find work," said Ned. "But, I'd rather work at home than live there. They hadn't half enough to eat and the boys quarreled all the time."

"A pretty bad crowd, I should say," said the little man. "Evil Genius takes lots of boys there and very few of them ever get away."

"Will you tell me who you are?" asked Ned.

"Certainly," replied the little man. "I am Mr. Smooth Pretence."

"Then this is the very place Evil

Genius told me to come," said Ned. "I hope you will not let him take me away again."

"No indeed," said Smooth Pretence. "Nobody ever gets any of my boys away from me if I can help it. I need them all."

"What do you do with them, Mr. Pretence," asked Ned.

"Oh, I teach them how to get things easily and live without hard work," said Smooth Pretence. "I have two very good friends that help me to teach them. They are Johnnie Lie and Willie Steal. They will soon be here and you can meet them. They are jolly good fellows to know."

"I should like to live without

work,” said Ned. “That is what I ran away from home for. But so far I have had more trouble than I had at home.”

“That is because you worked for Diso Bedience,” said Mr. Pretence. “He gets everybody into trouble. But wait till you meet Johnnie Lie and Willie Steal. You’ll like them.”

“I don’t believe I will,” said Ned. “Their names don’t sound exactly right. If you don’t mind I think I will go on now. I feel rested but I am still very hungry. Could you give me an apple turnover, Mr. Pretence?”

“Well, now, let me see,” said Smooth Pretence. “I think there is just one left. It is on the top shelf

in that closet. Just open the door and help yourself, Ned."

"Thank you, Mr. Pretence. You are very kind," said Ned, as he went toward the closet. He opened the door and stood on his tip toes to see what was on the shelf. Just then Mr. Smooth Pretence gave him a push that sent him slam, bang into the closet. Then he closed the door and locked it.

"Why did you do that?" cried Ned. "Please let me out, Mr. Pretence. There is no apple turnover here."

"Isn't there? Well, now, that's too bad," said Smooth Pretence. "Maybe Willie Steal took it. Just stay there till he comes and we'll ask him. I want you to meet my friends,

anyhow. They are such jolly good fellows you can't afford to miss them."

"I don't believe I care to meet them, Mr. Pretence," said Ned. "I'd rather be going, if you'll let me out. Please don't keep me shut up here. It's so stuffy."

"I'm sorry to refuse you, Ned," said Smooth Pretence. "But you have talked very wickedly about Mr. Evil Genius and Mr. Diso Bedience. I know them very well and both are good friends of mine. I shall have to keep you locked up till Mr. Lie and Mr. Steal come."

"I'll promise not to run away if you'll let me out, Mr. Pretence," said Ned. "This closet is terribly dirty.

The smell of it almost makes me sick. Why don't you have it cleaned?"

"Do you expect me to keep the whole house clean?" asked Smooth Pretence. "I keep the lawn and the front rooms clean for appearance sake, but what's the use of keeping the closets and the back rooms so neat? Nobody ever sees them."

"My mother always kept all the rooms clean," said Ned.

"Some folks are fools enough to do it," said Smooth Pretence. "But I'm not. If it looks all right from the outside you get just as much credit. But, here come Johnnie Lie and Willie Steal. Come out now and we'll ask them about that turnover."

When Ned came out, there stood

two of the very worst boys he had met at Mr. Diso Bedience's. Of course they knew him and at once began telling Smooth Pretence terrible stories about how he had acted before he ran away.

"He promised Diso Bedience that he would work for him forever," said Johnnie Lie.

"He stole Diso Bedience's dinner right off his plate," said Willie Steal.

"He ought to be sent back," said both together. "Shall we tell Diso Bedience to come and get him, Mr. Pretence?"

"I'd rather keep him, if he'll promise not to run away," said Smooth Pretence. "But, he'll get no apple turnovers here, that's certain. But

wait a moment. Johnnie, didn't you tell me you saw some fine apples over in Mr. Luckyman's orchard?"

"Plenty of 'em, Mr. Pretence," answered Johnnie. "They looked good, too. Wish we had some of them."

"Well, why *can't* we have some of them?" asked Smooth Pretence. "Have you forgotten how I told you to get them? Here's a good chance to teach Ned a lesson. Take him with you. If he tries to run away we'll take him back to Diso Bedience."

Poor Ned! He did not want to go but he dared not go back to Diso Bedience so he trudged along behind the other two.

When they got to Mr. Luckyman's,

Johnnie and Willie took Ned by the arms and led him into the orchard with them. Soon they were among the trees and gathering the apples as fast as they could. But Ned would neither touch nor taste the fruit. Johnnie and Willie both mocked him and sneered at him and called him "baby" and "goody boy," but he remained firm. While they were feasting on the stolen fruit, Mr. Luckyman came upon them suddenly and caught them before they could run away. As soon as they saw they were caught Johnnie seized Ned by one arm and Willie took him by the other. Then dragging him toward Mr. Luckyman, and both talking at once, they told how they had been go-



In Mr. Luckyman's Orchard

ing past his trees and had caught Ned in the very act of stealing his apples. Mr. Luckyman was very angry and without waiting to learn the truth he seized poor Ned and beat him terribly. Then calling Johnnie and Willie, he gave the young rascals as much fruit as they could carry as a reward for their honesty and bade them all begone.

When they got home and told Smooth Pretence how they had got the apples and how Ned had been punished he laughed heartily as though it were a very good joke.

"How did you like your 'apple turnover,' Ned?" he asked. And then they all laughed again.

"It was very wrong," said Ned to

Johnnie Lie. "You knew I did not steal his apples. He would not have whipped me if you had told the truth."

"Maybe not, Ned," said Smooth Pretence. "But then he would have whipped Johnnie. In Wilful Land people don't always tell the truth. If they did we would have no Johnnie Lies or Willie Steals. Better get rid of those funny notions, my boy. You will get along better here if you are more like other people."

"I wish I had never come," said Ned. "I'd start back now if I knew the way."

"You couldn't go back now, Ned," said Smooth Pretence. "It's a long, hard road, and up hill all the way. Better go on down."

CHAPTER V

NED FINDS A NEW FRIEND

Bruised and sore from the whipping he had received, and ashamed of the company he was in, Ned almost repented that he had ever started for Wilful Land. He would have been a great deal happier if he had stayed at home. He wondered what his mother and Jennie were doing now. No doubt they were warm and comfortable, while he was hungry and abused. But he knew it was all his own fault. Evil Genius had deceived him shamefully. People could *not* do just as they pleased in Wilful

Land. At least if they did they had to suffer a great deal from people stronger than themselves, who wanted to do just as *they* pleased, too. "After all," thought he, "one might be happier in doing what is right than in doing what he pleases." He felt that he had made a great mistake, but it could not be helped now. He could not go back. The road was terribly rough and all up hill. Then, too, the sun sprites might quit working and leave him in utter darkness. He would be afraid to try it alone. There was but one thing to do and that was to run away again. Smooth Pretence had gone away to attend to some work. Ned was so deep in thought that he had forgotten all about Johnnie Lie

and Willie Steal till Johnnie spoke to him.

"Well, Mr. Apple Turnover," said he. "What are you dreaming about?"

"He's planning another trip to Mr. Luckyman's, I'll bet," said Willie Steal.

"I hope he'll get more'n he did the last time," said Johnnie, at which they both laughed uproariously.

"I'm not planning, and I'm not dreaming," said Ned. "I've just come to a conclusion."

"Pity you didn't come to it sooner," said Willie. "It might have saved you the licking Mr. Luckyman gave you."

"I think it would," said Ned quietly.

"What are you going to do with your conclusion?" asked Johnnie.

"Act on it," said Ned promptly. "It will save me from taking any more of your thrashings."

"That's treachery," said Willie Steal. "We'll tell Mr. Pretence."

"Tell him what?" asked Ned.

"What you just said," said Johnnie. "That you came here to do as you pleased and that nobody shall ever thrash you again."

"I didn't say that," said Ned.

"You did, too," said Willie. "We both heard you say it. Didn't we, Johnnie?"

"Course we did," said Johnnie. "And he said lot's more—worse things than that. Mr. Pretence ought to

lock him up in the closet again. Let's go and tell him about it."

"All right. Let's do it," said Willie. And away the two little rascals ran.

Ned knew they would do all they could to get him into trouble. He was determined that he would not go back into that dirty closet again. He dashed out at the door and started to run as fast as his legs could carry him. But, alas, poor Ned! He went *down the hill* once more.

He had not gone far when he heard Smooth Pretence and the two boys running after him. He was too weak from hunger to make a long race. Besides, he got two or three hard falls by stumbling over rough

places in his path. At last, just as they were almost upon him he turned aside and hid himself in a little hollow till they passed by. He could hear their terrible threats of what they would do to him when they caught him and he wished most heartily that he had never come to Wilful Land.

He was so tired that he lay still to rest a few minutes after they had passed and before he knew it he fell asleep. How long he slept, Ned never knew. When he awoke from his nap the first thing he noticed was a loud snoring close at hand. Looking around he saw, lying near him and sleeping soundly, a boy of about his own size and age. The boy's clothing was in tatters, his face scratched

and bruised, and altogether Ned thought him the dirtiest person he had ever seen. In one hand he held a torn and battered hat. In the other he clutched a piece of stale bread from which he had been gnawing when he fell asleep. As Ned watched him he stirred uneasily and opened his eyes. After a moment he sat up and the two boys gazed at each other in silence.

"Who are you?" asked the new boy at last.

"I'm Ned Dawson. Who are you?" was Ned's reply.

"I'm Vaga Bond," replied the boy. "Some folks call me 'Tramp.' What are you doin' here?"

"Hiding," replied Ned. "What are you doing?"

"I'm hidin', too," said Vaga Bond.
"Who's tryin' to get you?"

"Mr. Smooth Pretence," said Ned.
"And Johnnie Lie and Willie Steal
are helping him."

"Johnnie Lie and Willie Steal?"
said Vaga Bond. "Reg'lar imps.
Wish I could catch 'em one at a time.
Bet I'd pay 'em for the trouble they've
made me."

"How have they made you trouble?" asked Ned.

"By gettin' me into scrapes with
'em and then lyin' out of it and lettin'
me take the lickin's," said Vaga Bond.
"Most all my troubles come through
Lie and Steal. But, how did you get
here and what's your trouble?"

"Mr. Evil Genius persuaded me to

come here so I could do as I pleased and never have to work," said Ned. "I ran away from Mr. Diso Bedience and met Mr. Smooth Pretence. He took me home to work for him and then Johnnie Lie and Willie Steal came. They made me go with them to get apples out of Mr. Luckyman's orchard, and when Mr. Luckyman came out they told him I was taking the apples and they had caught me. So I got licked and they got lots of apples for 'being good.'"

"Then you ran away, eh?" said Vaga Bond.

"Not till they wanted to have Mr. Pretence shut me up again in that dirty closet," said Ned. "That's a terrible place."

"He's shut me in there more'n once," said Vaga Bond.

"Maybe that's what makes it so dirty," said Ned.

"Maybe," said Vaga Bond. "What're you goin' to do now?"

"I don't know," answered Ned. "I've run away. I'll have to go on, I suppose."

"Let's go together," said Vaga Bond. "If we meet Johnnie Lie and Willie Steal we'll thrash 'em."

"Which way shall we go?" asked Ned.

"Down hill, o' course," said Vaga Bond. "Everybody goes down hill here. I know a Mr. Shirk, who lives down the hill. Let us go there. He's always glad to have somebody around

to keep him from taking too much exercise. He'd be glad to get you."

"I'd be glad to work for him if the work isn't too hard," said Ned.

"All work is too hard for me," said Vaga Bond. "I hate it."

"If Evil Genius had told the truth I wouldn't be working either," said Ned. "He said everybody here could do as he pleased."

"How could that be?" asked Vaga Bond. "When you do as you please and won't work, Mr. Shirk will have to do as he doesn't please and work for himself. You can't both do as you please if you want anything done."

"Can't you do as you please?" asked Ned?

"Not always," replied Vaga Bond. "I can do as I please about workin', but not about eatin'. Most of the time I have to do as other people please about that," he continued, looking at the piece of stale bread he was still nibbling.

Before Ned could make any reply they heard a loud shouting and saw some people running toward them with angry gestures.

"Come on," cried Vaga Bond, as he started to run. "We musn't let them catch us."

"Why not?" asked Ned. "We haven't done them any harm."

"But they might do us some," said Vaga Bond, running as fast as he could. So Ned ran after him.

The road was very rough and steep and Ned had not gone far till he got a hard tumble. Before he could get up again he was overtaken and the angry crowd gathered around him.

"That's him. Let's hang him," shouted an angry man.

"Thrash him good. He deserves it," said another.

"Take him to jail," said a third. "Such fellows ought all to be locked up."

"What do you want to lock me up for?" asked Ned. "I haven't done you any harm."

"You haven't?" said the angry man. "You've broken all my windows and trampled down all my

plants. Where's your ragged partner? We want him, too."

"I'm afraid the ragged one has escaped," said one of the men. "Good riddance, too, if he'll never come back. He's too dirty to touch."

"We'll give this one a good trimming, anyhow," said the angry man. "He can share it with his chum if he wants to."

And without waiting for any further argument he gave Ned a most terrible whipping.

"Now, get out of this as fast as you can," said the man. "If you tramps do any more mischief around here it'll be the worse for you."

"How could it be any worse?" sobbed Ned as they went away and

left him. "I'm no tramp, and I didn't break any windows. I'll bet Johnnie Lie did that just to get me into trouble. Well, that's licking number two and not much time lost in between either. I guess I've had about enough of Wilful Land. Too many people here do just as they please."

CHAPTER VI

NED AND MR. SHIRK

For a long time Ned sat rubbing his hurts and thinking about the flogging he had received. He was sure now that it was a dreadful mistake to come to Wilful Land. He wanted to go back but the hill was so steep and the way so rough he was afraid to try. He had seen nothing of Vaga Bond since he ran away and did not know what had become of him. He was tired, lonely and discouraged, but he must go somewhere. The men had told him to get out and he was afraid to stay there any longer. † There

seemed but one thing for him to do, and that was to go on down. But, down where? He did not know. Would he find it any better down there than here? If he had to be beaten and starved he might as well go back no matter how rough the road or steep the hill.

While he was debating with himself he saw a man coming toward him with a big bundle on his back. The man limped painfully as he walked and stooped under his burden as if it were heavy. He looked keenly at Ned as he came nearer and at last spoke pleasantly.

“Good morning, my little man,” said he. “Will you be kind enough to help me shift my pack?”

“Certainly,” said Ned. “What shall I do?”

“Just hold it a moment till I can rest my shoulders,” said the man.

Ned took hold of the bundle and, with the man’s help, lifted it to his own shoulders. It was quite heavy and it took some time to adjust it so he could hold it easily.

“There,” said the stranger. “That’s better. Now as you are traveling my way we’ll just walk on and as we go you can tell me who you are and where you are going.”

“I’m Ned Dawson,” replied Ned. “I came to Wilful Land with Evil Genius to do as I pleased, but I don’t like it as well as I thought I would.”

"Why not?" asked the stranger.
"Can't you do as you please?"

"Oh, yes," said Ned. "I suppose I can. But everybody else can do the same and sometimes they are stronger than I am and please to beat me."

"That's bad," replied the stranger.
"In that case you had better go home with me. I have been wanting a boy like you for some time."

"Won't you tell me who you are and where you live?" asked Ned.

"Certainly," replied the stranger.
"I am Mr. Shirk that lives down the hill."

"Then you are the man Vaga Bond told me about," said Ned.

"You know Vaga Bond, do you?" asked Mr. Shirk.

"Yes," said Ned. "I met him this morning, but we didn't stay together long."

"A graceless scamp," said Mr. Shirk. "Too lazy to work and too dirty to be seen. He is always up to some mischief. Only yesterday he broke the windows and trampled down all the flowers in my friend Mr. Greed's greenhouse."

"And he let me take the whipping he should have had for it, too," said Ned. "We were walking together when Mr. Greed and his friends came after us. Vaga Bond ran away but they caught me and gave me a dreadful whipping. It was all wrong, too, for I had never seen his flowers."

"That's altogether too bad," said

Mr. Shirk. "But it is just like one of Vaga Bond's tricks. I never could bear him. He would never carry my pack or do anything else for me."

"Won't you please take your pack now, Mr. Shirk?" asked Ned. "It is getting so heavy I can hardly carry it."

"I'm sorry, Ned, but I don't believe I can just yet," replied Mr. Shirk. "My health is rather delicate and my doctor has advised me to avoid work as much as possible."

"If we have much further to go I shall have to drop it, Mr. Shirk," said Ned. "It is really too heavy for me."

"Nonsense, Ned. Don't mention anything so dreadful," said Mr. Shirk.

"It would be ruinous to drop it. It is full of promises—bright golden promises. If you drop it they will all be broken."

"But I can't hold it any longer, Mr. Shirk," said Ned, staggering from side to side. "It will kill me if I do."

"And I'll kill you if you don't," said Mr. Shirk, angrily. "Do you think I will take that heavy bundle again just to relieve you? Well, I won't. So carry it along and no more of your grumbling."

Poor Ned was almost ready to drop. He felt that he could not carry the pack another moment, but he was afraid of Mr. Shirk and dared not drop it.

"This is terrible," thought he. "Evil

Genius told me I wouldn't have to work here. This is harder work than I ever had to do at home. Oh! it's slipping away. What shall I do? There it goes."

"Now see what you have done," shrieked Mr. Shirk. "You have broken all my precious promises and I shall never be able to get anybody to carry my pack again. I'll kill you."

He sprang toward Ned and tried to clutch him by the throat. Freed from his burden and almost wild with fear, Ned darted away. He knew he would fall if he tried to run down the hill, so he turned aside and plunged into a thicket of thorns and brambles that grew beside the way. Mr. Shirk tried to follow him, but the sharp

thorns tore his hands and face till he had to stop. Muttering all kinds of threats against poor Ned, he went back to gather up his pack and grieve over his broken promises. Ned rushed through the thicket so frightened that he hardly felt the pain of the thorns till he was sure Mr. Shirk had given up the chase. Then going more carefully, he worked his way through till he came out on the other side. There he sat down to rest. Poor Ned. If he could only have known how his mother at home was longing for him and how she watched and waited for him day by day, ready to forgive him and love him just as she had always done, he would have turned back up that hill at any cost. He was still

sitting there thinking of his desperate struggle to carry Mr. Shirk's pack when he was suddenly seized from behind and held tightly by a pair of strong hands.

"Oh, Mr. Shirk, please don't," cried he. "I couldn't help it, indeed I couldn't. It slipped out of my hands. I didn't mean to drop it. Please don't kill me."

"Ho, ho, ho," said a strange voice. "So I am Mr. Shirk, am I? Well, that's the first time I ever knew that. And what has Mr. Shirk been doing to you? You look rather used up."

"I ran through the bushes to get away from him," said Ned. "He was angry because I dropped his pack, but indeed I couldn't hold it any longer.

It was very heavy. I didn't mean to do it."

"All the better that you couldn't hold it," said the man pleasantly. "His golden promises are worthless trash. Neither he nor anybody else ever keeps them. But why were you carrying his pack? Who are you?"

"He asked me to hold it a moment till he rested and then he wouldn't take it again. My name is Ned Dawson. I came to Wilful Land with Evil Genius. But I have had so much trouble since I came that I wish I had never started. I am almost starved, too. Please, sir, could you give me an apple turnover?"

"No, Ned, I don't believe I can," said the man. "Apple turnovers are

rather scarce here because most of the fruit in Wilful Land is forbidden fruit and doesn't make good pies. But if you come with me I'll give you a good dinner. Maybe after that you will be willing to stay. You can help me in my work if you will."

"I shall be very glad to get the good dinner, sir," replied Ned. "And I am willing to work, too, if the work is not too hard. Will you please tell me who you are and what kind of work you do?" "Certainly! My name is Pastime—Mr. Vicious Pastime if you choose," said the man. "It is my business to furnish amusements for people who have a great deal of idle time on their hands. The work is very pleasant and not hard. I have only to

point out to such people the things that I think will give them the most pleasure. They do all the work and take all the risk."

"That must be very pleasant work, Mr. Pastime," said Ned. "I will be glad to help you if you will not let Mr. Shirk get me again."

"No fear of that, Ned," said Mr. Pastime. "I need bright and ready boys like you too badly to give them up when I find them. But come, now, let's go home and get that dinner. After that we'll talk things over. If you are willing to help me I'll keep you. Really I think it was a very lucky thing that I met you."

CHAPTER VII

WHAT MR. PASTIME DID

The first thing Mr. Pastime did when he got Ned home was to give him a good, big dinner. It was high time, too, for the poor fellow was almost starved. There were no apple turnovers, but there were plenty of other things that tasted good to a hungry boy and Ned ate heartily. After dinner they took a long walk together and Mr. Pastime showed Ned some of the places and amusements he provided for people who have too much idle time.

The first place they came to was a

building brightly lighted and crowded with people of all sorts, young and old. There was an orchestra that played and some of the people were dancing and there was a great deal of loud laughter and coarse talk. At one end of the room was a long counter covered with glasses and a man behind the counter kept filling the glasses with something from a long-necked bottle and giving it to the people to drink. After they drank it they laughed and talked louder than before and some of them staggered about when they tried to dance till they tumbled down on the floor. Then some men carried them away to make room for others.

“This,” said Mr. Pastime, “is one

of my dance halls. It is a very nice place and lots of people come here. They love to listen to the music and dance. When they dance they get thirsty. Then they go over to the counter yonder and Mr. Topsyman, who is one of my helpers, gives them a drink. This place is managed by one of the Ims. There are three of that family working for me. The one who manages here is a lady, Mrs. Im Modest. She is a hard worker and keeps a very busy place. You can see that lots of people come here."

"I see they do," said Ned. "But I don't like to see them stagger and fall, Mr. Pastime. Don't you think it would be better if Mr. Topsyman did not give them so much to drink?"

“Why, my dear fellow,” said Mr. Pastime. “How could they dance if they didn’t have something to drink when they got thirsty? Besides, everybody claims the right to do as he pleases here, you know. It doesn’t hurt them to fall now and then, and they soon get used to the staggering and don’t mind it. Of course if anyone does fall and get hurt it isn’t my fault. I only furnish the amusement. They take all the risk.

“That,” said Mr. Pastime, pointing to another building, “is one of my picture shows. It is kept by another of the Ims, Mr. Im Moral. He shows some very interesting pictures there. There are some old fogies who talk against it and preach about the bad

influence of the pictures, but that is none of my business. I simply show the pictures. If people don't want to see them they needn't come. It is all at their own risk, you know. People must be amused."

"What is in that other building over there?" asked Ned.

"That is our Vaudeville," said Mr. Pastime. "It is managed by Mr. Im Proper. It is a very popular and attractive place. Some of the plays are rather spicy, but they are all true to life and people seem to enjoy them. Would you like to go in?"

"No, thank you," said Ned. "I think I'd rather see something else, if you please. Do they have no ball games here?"

“Not that I know of,” said Mr. Pastime. “Such games are too boisterous for Wilful Land. But I can show you some other games that are more quiet and just as good. Come with me.”

He led Ned into another building where there were many tables and men seated at every table were playing games in which they used cards or little blocks of ivory with black dots on them.

“This is our Game Room,” said Pastime. “It is kept by Mr. Will Gamble, a fine fellow to know. You will like him, I’m sure. Some of the wealthiest and best people come here. It is a very refined place. That man over there at the counter is a brother

of the other Mr. Tipsyman. When people play games they get thirsty and excited and must have something to drink. We think it is better to have it handy than to let them go out after it. If they once got out they might not come back, you know."

"Are there any people here that do not dance and play games, Mr. Pastime?" asked Ned.

"Oh, yes, indeed," said Pastime. "Do you see that building over there? That is all given up to other amusements. The man in charge of it is Mr. B. Brutal. There they have prize fights, cock fights, dog fights and even bull fights. Oh, it is very exciting. Sometimes they even kill each other."

"And what do you do then, Mr. Pastime?" asked Ned.

"Nothing," said Pastime. "They take their own risk. We are not to blame. We simply furnish the amusements. Would you like to go in and see them?"

"No, indeed," said Ned; "I don't believe I will. Are there no schools or Sunday schools here, Mr. Pastime?"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha! Sunday schools in Wilful Land? What a ridiculous question!" said Pastime. "No indeed, Ned. There are no Sunday schools here. We are not such old fogies as that. Do you think there would be an amusement in a Sunday school?"

"Maybe not, if you mean fighting and killing," said Ned. "But it would be lots better to go to one and nobody would have to take any risk, either. I used to go to Sunday school before I came to Wilful Land. I had better times there than I have had here, too."

"How could you have, Ned, when there was no dancing, or drinking, or gambling, or fighting there?" asked Pastime. "Nobody in Wilful Land would call that a good time."

"Perhaps they wouldn't," said Ned. "But you haven't told me yet what you want me to do, Mr. Pastime."

"I'm coming to that now," said Mr. Pastime. "Do you see that handsome

new building over there with the letters above the door? That is our new 'Pastime School.' Some of the old fogies call it the School of Crime, but that is all due to jealousy. No matter about the name, anyway. It's the results we want. You see, there must be some place where boys and girls take their first lessons in amusements. To dance or drink or fight gracefully and well requires teaching and experience. Boys and girls will get that experience in our new school. Now, what we need is somebody to help get the boys and girls into the school. That is where we need you, Ned, and a whole lot of boys like you. If we can get boys to help us our new school will soon be filled. And just think

how many friends you will have among us. It's a great opportunity, Ned. Will you take it?"

"No, Mr. Pastime," said Ned. "I don't think I can. I have changed my mind since coming here. I don't believe boys and girls are as happy in Wilful Land as they are at home. I think I shall try to go back again."

"Don't be foolish, Ned," said Pastime. "You could never go back up that hill. You have gone too far to turn back now. It will be much easier to go on down."

"But where does this road lead to, Mr. Pastime," asked Ned.

"Nobody knows exactly," said Pastime. "Nobody who has gone far

enough to see the end has ever come back to tell us. Mr. Don't Care has gone farther down than any other one I know of. He tells us of some very interesting things farther down. There is a great level plain down there all dotted over with little mounds, and beyond that he heard strange sounds as of people moaning and crying, but it was too dark to see what caused them. All those that go there must be well pleased, for no one has ever yet come back."

"Maybe they can't come back," said Ned.

"Oh, that is not likely," said Mr. Pastime. "In Wilful Land, you know, most people do just as they please. I think I should like to go

down some time and see for myself what is there."

"Why don't you do it?" asked Ned.

"I might not be able to come back," said Mr. Pastime.

"Not even if you wanted to?" asked Ned. "I thought you said everybody in Wilful Land could do just as he pleased."

"So I've always been told," said Mr. Pastime. "But there might be some mistake about that, and then I'd be in a terrible fix. The risk is rather too great. Don't you think so, Ned?"

"Indeed I do," said Ned. "It's too great either to go further or to stay here any longer, and I'm going back."

"Oh, Ned," said Mr. Pastime anxiously. "You surely wouldn't try

to do anything so foolish as that. Just think of the terrible climb you would have up that long, steep hill. You've come a long ways since you first started out with Evil Genius, Ned."

"Yes," said Ned. "And I've paid dearly for it, too. I've been kicked, cuffed and starved till I'm as thin as a scarecrow, and I'm so ragged that Mother and Jennie wouldn't know me. It has been a long, hard journey, and down, down, down all the way. Going back may be rough, uphill work, but it can't be any worse. Anyhow, I'm going. No matter how high the hill or how rough the way, I'm going. Goodby, Mr. Pastime."

"Oh, well, if you won't listen I suppose you'll have to go, Ned. Goodby.

I'm afraid you'll have a hard time getting past Mr. Smooth Pretence and Mr. Diso Bedience. They never like to see anyone go back and they'll hinder you all they can."

"Let them hinder," said Ned. "It will do no good. I've made up my mind—I'M GOING BACK."

CHAPTER VIII

I'M GOING BACK

No sooner had Ned declared that he was "going back" than he began to feel better and stronger. He knew the hill was steep and the way rough, but he did not fear to try it.

"After all," thought he, "it makes a difference what a fellow really *wants* to do. I want to get out of Wileful Land and *I'm going up that hill*. Let's see," he mused. "Coming here, Evil Genius told me to always turn to the left and to keep on going down. It is plain, then, that going back I must always turn to the right and keep on going up. Well, I'm ready,

so here goes. Right about! March!" And obeying his own command, like the good soldier he meant to be, Ned, for the first time, started upward.

At first he had nothing to overcome but the steep grade of the hill. It was not quite as easy as going down, but he didn't mind that so long as he could see that he was gaining ground.

When he came to the place where he had run away from Mr. Shirk he kept a sharp lookout for fear he might meet that old rascal once more. He was determined never again to carry that load of worthless promises. He saw the thicket of brambles through which he had plunged to get away, and the very sight of it made him shudder.

"I wonder if any other poor fellow ever had to go through that," said Ned. "If he did I should think he'd want to get out of this country as badly as I do."

Just after passing the thicket his eye caught something that made him stop and look. There stretched out on the hard ground beside the road and sleeping peacefully in the warm sun lay Vaga Bond.

"Ha," said Ned quietly; "that's the fellow that got me into trouble and let me get whipped. If he were not almost too dirty to touch I'd like to give that drubbing back to him before I go. Guess I'll do it anyhow—he deserves it."

Going up to the young scamp, Ned



What Vaga Bond Got

gave him a lusty kick that woke him up in a hurry.

"What do you mean thumpin' me like that?" said Vaga Bond. "Can't a feller sleep if he wants to?"

"No, not now," said Ned. "Get up. You're the fellow that broke down Mr. Greed's flowers and left me to take the blame. I'm going back out of Wilful Land, but before I go I'm going to give you a royal thrashing to pay for the one I got."

"Oh, please don't, Ned," said Vaga Bond. But before he could say another word Ned seized him by the collar and gave him a hearty cuffing, and finally with a thumping whack sent him rolling down the hill bellowing for mercy. His dirty hat lay where

he had been sleeping and Ned picked it up to throw after him. As he did so he noticed some letters stamped inside and read the name written there.

"Huh," said he; "just common 'Laziness,' after all. I suppose Vaga Bond is his company name. Well, it's as good as any for him. I don't believe Vaga Bond or Laziness either one will bother me much hereafter."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!" laughed a familiar voice. "Served him right. That's just what he has needed this long while. See him run. I'd like to sit here and watch him all day. Guess he'll not bother you again."

"I hope not, Mr. Shirk," said Ned, for it was no other than Mr. Shirk himself. "And I don't care to see very

much of you, either. I'm going back out of Wilful Land now and I'm carrying none of your promises."

"They're all broken now since you dropped my pack," said Mr. Shirk sadly. "But you can't go back, Ned. See how steep the hill is. It will be terribly hard to climb."

"No matter," said Ned; "I'm going back."

"And then there's Mr. Smooth Pretence and Mr. Diso Bedience," said Mr. Shirk. "They'll be sure to stop you."

"Do you think so?" asked Ned. "Well, I'M GOING BACK."

"Oh, well," said Mr. Shirk. "If you are so determined I suppose we'll

have to let you go. I'm sorry to lose you, though, Ned."

"And I'm very glad to get rid of you," said Ned. "Where's your pack?"

"I have it here by me, Ned," said Mr. Shirk. "Will you carry it for me a little while?"

"Certainly, with pleasure," said Ned. "Just bring it here."

"I'd rather you'd come and get it, Ned," said Mr. Shirk. "My doctor's orders are very strict. I must avoid effort of any kind."

"Oh, excuse me, Mr. Shirk," said Ned. "I forgot about your delicate health. I'll come and get it at once."

He went to where Mr. Shirk sat and picked up the bulky bundle. It

did not seem so heavy as it did the first time. Ned tossed it lightly to his shoulder and then, with a swing and a fling, sent it bounding and jingling down the steep hillside.

"Now go," said he to Mr. Shirk. "I think your health will be better if you get more exercise. Travel without effort and travel fast. Overtake that pack if you can."

Mr. Shirk waited for no second bidding. With a howl of terror he dashed down the hill and was soon out of sight.

"Good riddance to bad rubbish," said Ned. "I've settled with two of them, anyhow. Now if I could get rid of the others the same way I think I would enjoy my journey up hill better than down."

CHAPTER IX

A RACE WITH FOLLY AND FEAR

After Ned had routed Vaga Bond and Mr. Shirk he had no further trouble for a long time. He marched steadily up the hill, turning to the right at every corner and growing stronger and more self-reliant every day. The upward climb was really not as hard as he had expected to find it. As long as he went straight forward and turned only to the right he met with nothing to hinder or delay him. Once or twice he attempted to turn aside from the path to pluck some tempting fruit that hung just beyond his reach, but the sharp rocks hurt his

feet, the brambles stung him, and the fruit when he reached it was bitter and unfit to eat.

"There seems to be only one right way," said Ned, "and that is to *go straight ahead and keep going.*"

He kept a sharp watch all the time for Mr. Smooth Pretence. He was determined he would never again be shut up in that dirty closet. One day he had to pass over a part of the road that was particularly rough and steep. At one point it ran quite close to the edge of a high bluff. At the bottom of the bluff was a stream of murky water that dashed and foamed over hidden rocks. On the banks of the stream were thickets of thorn and bramble. By this time Ned had grown

so confident that he walked along quite carelessly and did not seem to mind the dangerous place a bit. He had almost passed it when he heard some one calling.

"I wonder who that can be," said he as he stopped to listen. "There must be some one down there. I wonder if he has fallen."

He listened again and once more he heard the call.

"Who are you and what do you want?" asked Ned.

"Here I am on the bank of the stream below you," replied the voice. "I have found something wonderful. There is gold in the stream—bright, shining gold. I have found a fortune."

"But where are you?" asked Ned.
"I can see no one."

"I am under the bluff," said the voice. "You can't see me from there. Come down and I will fill your pockets with gold."

Ned was greatly excited. He forgot the danger of getting out of the direct path. If he could fill his pockets with gold it would repay him for all his trouble in Wilful Land. He could go home to his mother and Jennie rich and a hero.

"Hurry down," called the voice again. "It is all here and free for the gathering. You will never have another such a chance."

"How did you get down?" asked Ned. "I see no path."

"I lost my way and stumbled over the bluff," said the voice. "I fell into the water and was not hurt a bit. You can jump from the bluff into the stream just below the bend. The water is not deep."

"But how can we get back?" asked Ned.

"Don't worry about that," said the voice. "With plenty of gold we shall be able to find a way. We can go back down the hill if need be and start over."

"True enough," replied Ned. "I didn't think of that. If I can go home rich," thought he, "it will repay me for being late. It is worth the risk and I'll try it."

He crept as close to the edge as he



The Leap For Gold

could and selecting a place where the water seemed free from rocks, he plunged over. Poor Ned! He had made another mistake. The water at the place he had selected was free from rocks, but it was so shallow that it did not break his fall and he struck the ground with a frightful thump that knocked the breath quite out of him.

“Ha, ha, ha—ho, ho, ho!” laughed a voice that made Ned shiver. “So here you are once more, my fine fellow. This time you will not get away so easily.”

There on the bank looking at him with a cunning leer was Mr. Smooth Pretence.

“You didn’t expect to see me again,

did you, Ned?" asked Pretence. "Well, I think so highly of you that I am not willing to let you go, so I am going to take you back home with me. If you'll be good, though, I'll promise not to shut you in the closet again."

"Would you expect me to believe any promise you made, Mr. Pretence?" asked Ned as soon as he could get his breath. "Where is the gold you promised me for jumping down from the bluff?"

"Here it is, Ned, and plenty of it," said Smooth Pretence. "Fill your pockets, my boy. Take all you want. Here are all Mr. Shirk's bright golden promises. I found them down the hill where you threw them when you

drove him away, and I brought them along to repay you for leaving the upward path." As he spoke Mr. Smooth Pretence emptied Mr. Shirk's pack into the murky waters of the stream and told Ned once more to fill his pockets.

"Come, Ned," said Smooth Pretence. "It is time we should be going. I'll give you a big apple turnover as soon as we get home."

"I'm not going home with you, Mr. Pretence," said Ned, "so you need make me no more promises. I shall find my way back into the upward path and go on once more."

"Not so fast, my dear boy," said Smooth Pretence as Ned started away. "You go home with me. I haven't

waited and watched for you here for nothing. You can't get away now."

"Then I'll fight you," said Ned.
"You shall never take me back."

He dashed into the thicket of brambles and ran with all his might. The sharp thorns tore his clothing and stung his hands and face, but he did not stop.

"Better to be caught by the thorns than by Smooth Pretence," said Ned as he sped along.

"Here, stop him," cried Smooth Pretence. "After him, Johnnie Lie; catch him, Willie Steal. Out of your hiding and run. Turn loose the dogs. He must not get away from me again. Here, Folly; here, Fear—good dogs—seize him. Tear him to pieces."

Ned took one glance over his shoulder as he ran. He saw the great dogs running with wide-open mouths as if ready to tear him to bits, and it only made him run the faster. Through the brush he went till he was ready to drop, but luckily for him he was running *up hill*, and while he almost fainted from weariness, he noticed that the dogs could make no gain on him while running upward.

"I guess Folly and Fear must be down-hill dogs," panted Ned. "I should not like to run downward and be driven by them."

At last he broke through the bushes and found himself scratched, torn and bleeding on the upward path once more.

“That was a terrible trip,” said Ned. “If I have to make another like it I’m afraid I shall never taste any more of mother’s apple turnovers. But I’ll not make another. It has cured me of my fancy for gold. Gold, indeed, in that muddy, murky stream. What could I have been thinking about? I might have known it was a falsehood. And he had Johnnie Lie and Willie Steal waiting to help him take me home. And then to be chased by two such hideous dogs as Folly and Fear. It was frightful. But I’m back once more on the upward path and I’ll stay there, too, till I get out of Wilful Land.”

CHAPTER X

A GREAT BATTLE AND A GREAT VICTORY

After Ned had bathed his wounded hands and face and rested awhile he began to feel better. Thinking about his terrible experience, he went on up the hill, taking care not to step aside from the path for a moment. He felt sure he would see no more of Smooth Pretence, for he was now far past the place where he had first met him. The two great dogs, Folly and Fear, were also far behind him, and as they could not run fast up hill, he had little to fear from them. But he still had to pass through the province of Mr. Diso

Bedience and he had seen Johnnie Lie and Willie Steal there on his way down and knew he was likely to meet them there again.

"Well, if I do I'll fight them. I'll never yield," said he aloud.

"And what if they win?" asked a hearty voice at his side.

Ned turned quickly and there walking beside him was a sturdy looking boy of about his own age with the brightest and most manly smile he had seen in Wilful Land.

"They'll not win," said Ned. "And if they do I'll fight them again. It couldn't be any worse than I've already gone through. I've started to go back out of Wilful Land and, come what may, *I'm going back.*"

“Good,” said the boy. “I’m glad to hear that kind of talk. It will make it easier for me if you keep up that spirit.”

“And who are you, please?” asked Ned. “Why will it make it easier for you?”

“Because I am Percy Vere,” replied the boy. “I am sent by the Prince of Good Purpose to cheer you in your last stand against the powers of Wilful Land. We shall have to fight them again before we get out, but if we win this battle it will be the last.”

“Who will fight us?” asked Ned. “Will it be Diso Bedience?”

“Yes,” replied Percy Vere. “Diso Bedience will be the leader, for we are in his country. But all the others

will be ready to help him. They all work together, and a fight with one is a fight with all."

"Have you ever seen Mr. Smooth Pretence and Mr. Shirk?" asked Ned.

"Oh, yes," replied Percy Vere. "They are brothers of Mr. Diso Bedience. Together they control the forces for evil in Wilful Land. They always try to keep every boy who comes here."

"And who are Vaga Bond and Johnnie Lie and Willie Steal?" asked Ned.

"Vaga Bond is the son of Mr. Shirk," replied Percy. "Johnnie Lie is the son of Mr. Diso Bedience, and Willie Steal the son of Smooth Pretence. They are always on hand and

ready to help. Folly and Fear are their trained watch dogs to catch and hold or tear to pieces the unfortunate one that tries to escape."

"They are fierce looking brutes," said Ned. "I'm mighty glad they didn't catch me."

"You could not have escaped them if you had run down hill," said Percy Vere. "The upward path is the only safe one through Wilful Land."

"And will we have to stand alone against all these?" asked Ned.

"Yes," said Percy Vere. "But we shall probably see no one but Diso Bedience at first. The others will lie concealed and wait for him to conquer. If he succeeds they will all rush

out and help him to destroy us. If he fails they will lie still and tremble."

"I hope Johnnie Lie and Willie Steal will be with him," said Ned. "I want to return something I got from them on the way down."

"They probably will be," said Percy Vere. "They are generally mixed up in all the meanness that goes on. But we shall soon know, for we are in their province now and not far from the end of our journey."

He had scarcely finished speaking when they saw Mr. Diso Bedience coming toward them.

"Ha! so you're here again, are you?" said he to Ned as pleasantly as it was possible for him to speak. "I'm glad to see you coming back. I hope

you are ready and willing to stay with me now."

"No, Mr. Diso Bedience, I am not," replied Ned. "I am going back out of Wilful Land and this is my only way home."

"Well, you can't pass here with my consent," said Diso Bedience. "This part of Wilful Land belongs to me, and boys who come here of their own will owe me a service which they've got to pay."

"I suppose Mr. Evil Genius, who persuaded me to come, is your friend, too, is he not, Mr. Diso Bedience?" said Ned.

"He is," replied Diso Bedience. "But he did not compel you to come."

Everybody does as he pleases about coming here."

"Everybody does as he pleases after he gets here, too, if he is able," said Ned. "And most of them have pleased to make it very hard for me. But it is ended now, Mr. Diso Bedience. Stand aside, please, and let me pass."

"You'll never pass here, Ned," replied Diso Bedience. "Either come with me or give me your promise not to run away."

"I'll do neither," said Ned. "*I'm going back.*"

He attempted to pass, but Diso Bedience seized him and a terrific struggle followed. Diso Bedience was older and stronger, but Ned was

young and active, and what he lacked in strength he more than made up in quickness. Heavy blows and stiff punches were given and received by both fighters. Diso Bedience tried hard to get Ned by the throat to choke him into submission, but as often as he did so Ned tripped him up, and after several hard falls he grew more wary. As often as Ned faltered or seemed to hesitate Percy Vere cheered him on to greater effort. At last, after a particularly hard bump, Diso Bedience drew back and shouted for help.

"Now we'll have Johnnie Lie coming," said Percy Vere. "Will you be able to fight them both, Ned?"

"Will I?" said Ned. "Only give

me the chance. I'm not half whipped yet. Besides, I owe Johnnie one anyhow."

In a moment Johnnie came running up and, without waiting a moment to parley or rest, Ned seized him, and a fiercer struggle than ever began. Up and down and round and round they went. Diso Bedience was so badly winded that he could do little more than bluster and threaten. The great fight was between Ned and Johnnie. They were of about the same size and pretty evenly matched, and for a while it was doubtful which would conquer. But if "might" sometimes "makes right," it is equally true that right creates might, and as the struggle waged Ned's strength seemed



The Last Great Battle

rather to increase than fail. Gradually he forced himself forward till Johnny, beaten and discouraged, turned to flee.

"No, no," said Ned. "That won't do. This is not merely a fight. It is a fight with a drubbing thrown in. I must give you the whipping that Mr. Luckyman gave me for you."

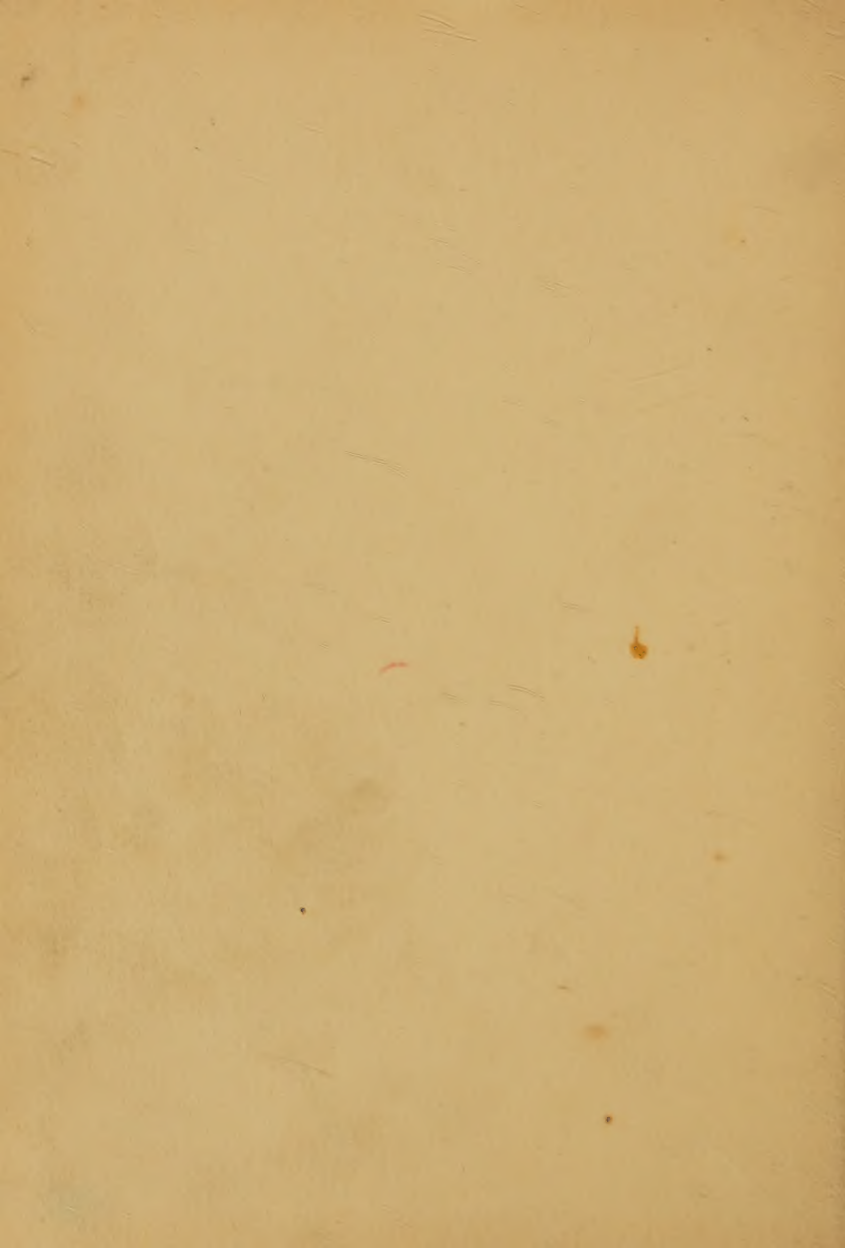
Seizing the cringing rascal with one hand, he caught up a stick with the other and gave him such a flogging that he howled with pain.

"There, go now," said he at last. "I guess my score with you is about even. If I could only catch Willie Steal before I leave Wilful Land I'd be glad to give him all I have left."

"You'll get no chance to meet him

now,” said Percy Vere. “You have made your last fight and it has been a good one. From this time on you will have to watch out for Evil Genius only. If you ever let him coax you back into Wilful Land you will have all your troubles over again. There is the boundary. Go straight forward, Ned, and when you have once crossed it never look back. It is better to ‘be good’ in your homeland than to be miserable in Wilful Land. I must leave you here. I hope I may never have to befriend you again on such an errand.”

“I am sure you never will,” said Ned. “I’ve had enough. I’m going straight home to mother. She’ll give me that apple turnover.”





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